

# Traffic Safety Facts

## Laws

January 2006

## Sobriety Checkpoints

### Background

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) encourages States to enact legislation authorizing the use of sobriety checkpoint enforcement efforts and to fully implement checkpoints once enacted. Sobriety checkpoints are a tool that adopts the effective strategy of employing high-visibility enforcement combined with publicity that States can use to reduce impaired driving by creating both general and specific deterrence.

NHTSA defines a sobriety checkpoint as the stopping of vehicles, or a specific sequence of vehicles (e.g., every fifth vehicle), at a predetermined fixed location to detect drivers who are impaired by alcohol and/or other drugs. One purpose of a sobriety

checkpoint is to increase the perceived risk of detection and arrest for individuals who might otherwise decide to drive impaired. This is a checkpoint's general deterrence effect. The fact that all, or a predetermined proportion of, vehicles are stopped reduces the impaired drivers' confidence that they can avoid being detected by concealing or compensating for alcohol and/or drug impairment.

### Key Facts:

- In 2004, 39 percent of the 38,253 fatal motor vehicle crashes nationwide were alcohol-related.
- The use of checkpoints enhances the visibility of overall impaired-driving enforcement efforts and contributes significantly to general and specific deterrence.
- Literature reviews show that checkpoints are associated with reductions in alcohol-related fatalities—a median decrease of 20 percent.
- Checkpoints were found effective regardless of staffing levels or location movement. This means low staffing and frequently moving checkpoints

are feasible enforcement options.

- As of January 2006, sobriety checkpoints are allowed in 39 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Iowa, Idaho, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming do not allow sobriety checkpoints.

### Incentive Grant Program

In 2005, Congress enacted the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). Section 2007 of SAFETEA-LU amends the alcohol-impaired-driving countermeasures incentive grant program (under Section 410 of chapter 4 of Title 23) to encourage States to adopt and implement effective programs to reduce traffic safety problems resulting from individuals driving while impaired by alcohol. One of the countermeasures promoted in the statute includes conducting a series of high-visibility, statewide law enforcement campaigns and the use of sobriety checkpoints or saturation patrols. A State may use these grant funds to implement the checkpoints or patrols.

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Reports and additional information are available from your State Highway Safety Office; the NHTSA Regional Office serving your State; NHTSA Headquarters, Office of Impaired Driving and Occupant Protection, ATTN: NTS-111, 400 Seventh Street, SW., Washington, DC 20590; 202-366-2683; or NHTSA's Web site at [www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov).